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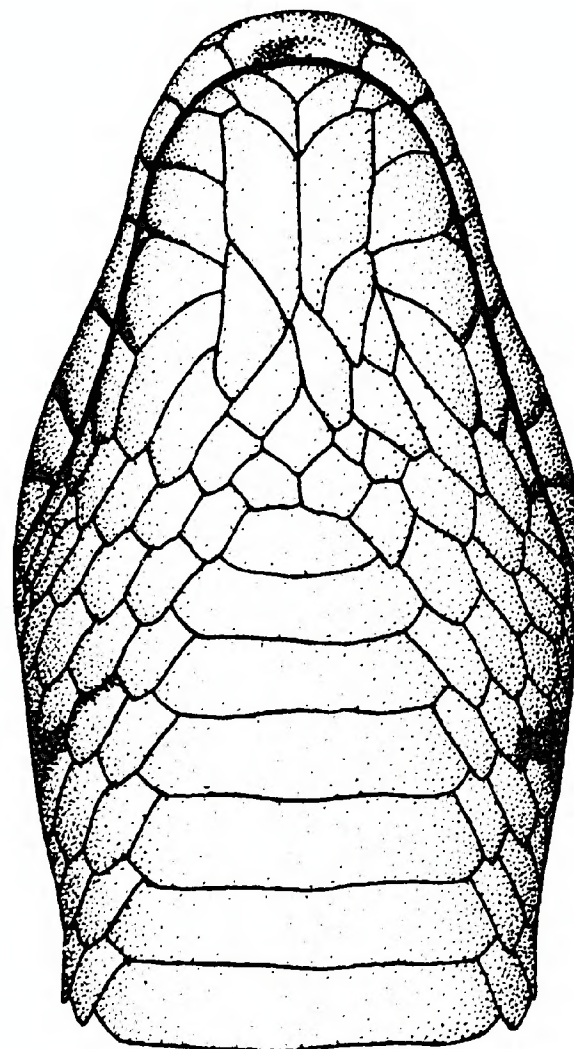
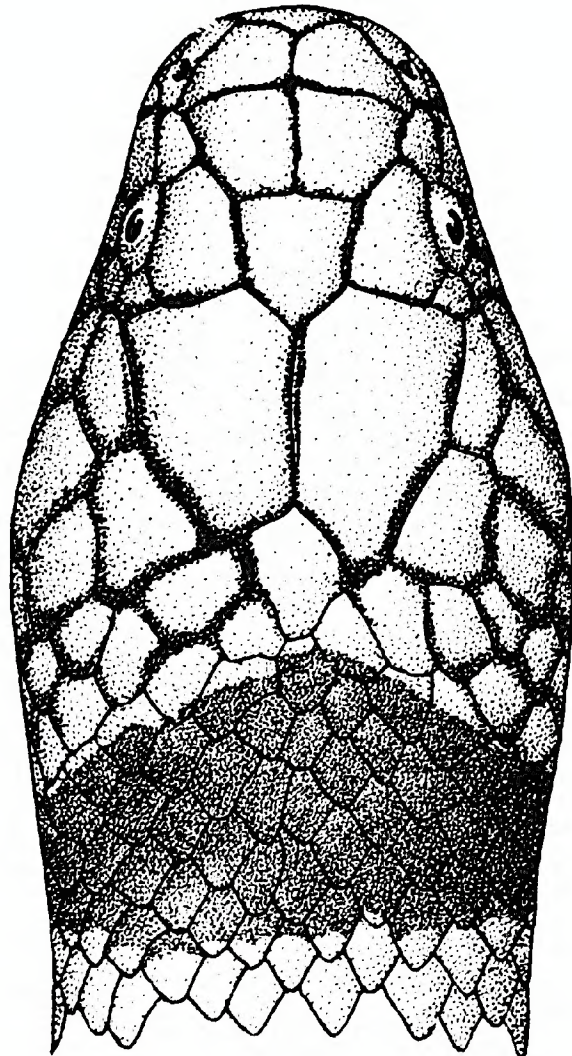
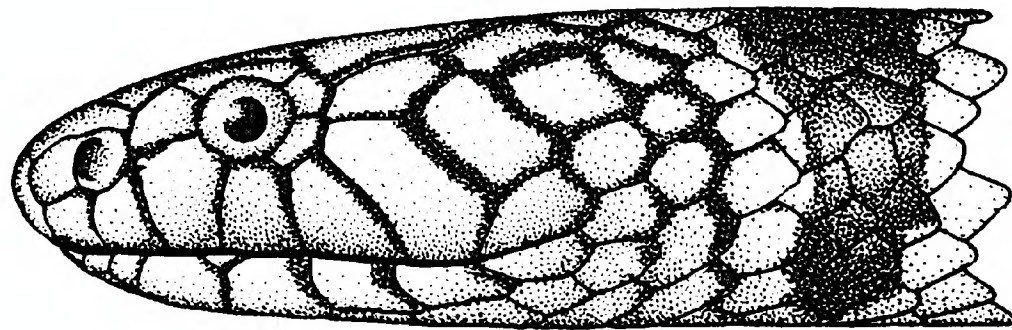
## Chicago Herpetological Society

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Volume 38, Number 12  
December 2003





# BULLETIN OF THE CHICAGO HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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## The Australian Herp Scene as of Early 2003—Part III

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### Hot and Cold

The trend in Australia in recent years has been for a liberalization of wildlife keeping laws here. That's been good for the reptile keepers. But it's been different in every state.

By Australian standards and in terms of being a reptile keeper, Victoria and South Australia have had it pretty good for the last ten years or so. Maybe that's why I'm here in Melbourne (Victoria). New South Wales, which was terrible for over two decades has recently thawed out and finally got a workable licensing system in place. *Smuggled-2* is what finally caused that. Queensland has ranged from bad to not so bad over the last two decades and while bearable for most herpers, there is a constant tug by the wildlife authorities to tighten things up.

As I write this article, the Queensland NPWS are trying to stop private keepers from keeping venomous snakes. Now to many people in the UK and the USA that mightn't sound like a bad thing, but here in Australia that's a calamity when you realize that a huge portion of what we have is venomous. And so another battle is being fought.

Then there was that species of snake I named after Roy Pails: *Pailsus pailsei*. When I described it in 1998, there were only two specimens known to science. That was the type specimen and another old-aged snake in Roy Pails' private collection.

I was led to believe that the Queensland NPWS would happily grant permits to anyone who wanted to go and catch them for a legitimate purpose. But in Queensland when it comes to issuing permits there's usually a catch. The local NPWS have this fixation with the idea that snakes are worth money—that's all snakes—and they choose to impose a so-called "tariff" on any snakes that are collected from the wild.

A few years ago, Fred Rossignoli wanted to capture a few common kinds like small-eyed snakes (*Cryptophis*), whip snakes (*Demansia*), rough-scaled snakes (*Tropidechis*) and eastern brown snakes (*Pseudonaja*). All are dirt common in Queensland and regularly killed as pests by people in cities and in the bush. Fred was told that he could get the permits (for one or two of each—no more), but would have to pay between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per snake as a tariff to the wildlife department.

He did his maths. Over \$10,000 for eight lousy snakes. They had to be kidding! These snakes sell for about \$50 each, tops. But because they are all snappy little rascals, no one in their right mind would want to keep them and so Fred had trouble buying them . . . which is why he'd sought the collection permits in the first place.

And why did Fred want the snakes? Well he was doing educational lectures for schools and he wanted them for the lectures. He didn't want them because they were "nice," "rare," "worth money" or anything else that a wildlife bureaucrat would necessarily think of as "bad." But then again, since when have wildlife bureaucrats ever really worried about things like educating school kids about identifying different kinds of snakes?

Fred couldn't afford to spend a couple of thousand dollars to go to Queensland to capture a few lousy snakes (he'd wanted at least four of each, so that he could rotate them through his shows on different days), and then pay another \$10,000 to the department for the privilege, so he abandoned the idea and gave up. And so ever since, Fred's never had any whip snakes, rough-scaled snakes or small-eyed snakes in his shows, although he managed to pick up a few legal brown snakes from someone in South Australia.

Others who applied to the Queensland NPWS got the similar treatment. Most were refused permits to collect, or if they got lucky (?), then paid for the right to capture a pitifully small number of snakes. And so the illegal collection of snakes in that state remains rife. That's because the alternative is just impossible for most people.

Now there is just one other thing I should mention in relation to the Queensland NPWS and their issuing of collect permits. For some years now a select group of academics and other individuals associated with some zoos in Queensland have had unfettered rights to capture and collect what they like. Ostensibly these permits have been granted for research, and yes, most have been bona fide, but some have not been. Those were effectively just for the purposes of enhancing private collections. That's usually called double standards.

And that's where the *Pailsus pailsei* comes back into the story. You see after I described this new species of snake, the venom research people wanted to get hold of the venom to do their tests. Peter Mirtschin of Venom Supplies at Tanunda in South Australia, shot across to Roy Pails' place in Ballarat and got some venom for a few initial tests. But the snake is as old as they come and literally knocking on heaven's door. Peter got a bit of venom, but he wanted more.

So he applied to the Queensland wildlife department for a permit. And yes, they actually offered to give him one. But at a price. He had to pay for each snake that he captured. Mirtschin didn't want a bar of it. After all what really are *Pailsus*? They are best described as snappy brown mongrels of things that no sane keeper in his right mind would want to keep. They are not what you'd call a "money snake." Peter told the department he wanted the permit, but didn't want to pay for the snakes. They said "no deal."



He noted that so-called academics at institutions were getting collect permits and not having to pay “tariffs” and that he too was involved in bona fide research. But as far as Q/NPWS were concerned Mirtschin was private, and the sweetheart deals were in the main for fellow government employees only. And so there was a deadlock.

Mirtschin put in a complaint to the Queensland Ombudsman (a so-called government watchdog) and as I understand it, as of early 2001, the complaint is still being looked at. Meanwhile, the Queensland NPWS have taken the complaint in their stride and simply gone hard on issuing any new permits, claiming they are awaiting the results of the Ombudsman’s inquiries.

Fortunately it seems that the *Pailsus* snakes are a bit more widespread than at first thought, with specimens since turning up in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, as well as a similar species (*P. rosignolii*) in Irian Jaya. But with a civil war going on in Irian Jaya at the time of writing, it may not be too easy to get snakes from there at the moment. Maybe Peter can get his snakes from elsewhere.

### Money for Snakes Mark Two

Queensland NPWS aren’t the only bureaucrats with this idea that every reptile in the state is theirs to hang onto (even if they get killed by shovels, run over and the like) and then sell the odd specimen to the few people stupid enough to apply for permits to collect them.

The same sort of mindset applies in the Northern Territory. In this country, every wildlife department has as policy a no-mutants rule. That is, no one is allowed to breed things like albinos and the like, because they are unnatural. Er, except when someone in the bureaucracy can make a buck out of it. In 1999 there was a bit of a brouhaha over an albino carpet snake that had been held at the Territory Wildlife Park for several years.

Policy of the NT Government and NPWS (who owned the park) was not to breed the snake because it was a mutant. Tim Mensforth and Roly Burrell offered \$20,000 for the snake and were knocked back. Another breeder, Neil Simpson, also tried unsuccessfully to get the snake, and for him, money was no object, he had heaps. Thus, money wasn’t the issue (or so it seemed); it was just the government’s policy — no breeding mutants.

However in late 1999, the same snake was shifted to Simon Stone of Adelaide for the sole purpose of breeding. Bill Freeland (Director of Parks and Wildlife NT), released the snake to Mr. Stone on the apparent condition that when the snake does breed, half the offspring go back to the Territory Wildlife Park.

With no one knowing the real reasons for the sudden shift in policy by the NT government, the losers in the deal (those who were unable to get the snake in the first instance) called for an investigation. An allegation was made that a contact in a major phone company paid a substantial sum to Mr. Freeland or someone else in the NT Bureaucracy, but the allegation was hotly denied and there was no independent inquiry.

And yes, there was another brouhaha over another apparent reversal of policy in the Territory Parks and Wildlife Service over an albino olive python (*Liasis olivaceus*) that surfaced in the NT.

### Are All Herpetologists Criminals? Again?

When most people think about smugglers and law-breakers in herpetology, it’s usually thought or implied that “private” collectors are the biggest offenders. But the evidence in this regard just doesn’t stack up. The so-called professionals are into the caper as well. Why? I suppose it’s because they are human.

Now I’m not tarring all professionals (or “amateurs”) with the same brush, but like all humans, there are some who will try to scam the system for their own benefit and yes, some will get caught.

In 1999, the reptile curator at the San Diego Zoo, Earl Thomas Schultz, got busted after legally importing Australian pythons and lizards to the United States. Contrary to the terms of the permits he on-sold the reptiles to private breeders in the USA. He later pled guilty to the charges. Oh and yes, professional herpetologists also get picked up at airports by officials who have their names keyed into their computer databases.

### Bugger the Permits?

Then there’s that other well-known Australian herpetologist with rich parents. So rich in fact that this enables this person to spend most of his spare time traveling in search of herps. For the moment, I’ll keep his name confidential, although you don’t need to be a Rhodes Scholar to work out who he is. He’s the bloke who claims to be a sparkie (that’s Australian slang for an electrician), but besides being a herper (of which he is a very talented one), he’d probably have trouble working an iron lung.

He spends most of his time going all over Australia (and more recently overseas) capturing reptiles and photographing them. His photos are as good as they get, and many readers will have seen them in a number of books and magazines. He doesn’t usually bother with the permits because, he says, “Why should I bother? If I apply for them, I’d wait a year to be told ‘No (expletive) way,’ so I just get in the car and go and grab what I like and by the time anyone knows what’s happening, I’m back here in Melbourne.” And in fairness to him, most other reptile people in Australia operate the same way, because it’s the only feasible alternative.

He’s been busted twice in the field capturing reptiles, but managed to beat the charges both times because he had sensible (and/or snake-hating) magistrates hearing the charges.

He’s also had a couple of near misses.

Once in South Australia. He thinks he was put into the wildlife department over there by an enemy here in Melbourne, but evidence suggests that it was more likely it was because he spoke to someone whose phone was being monitored by police at the time over other matters and so he got caught up in the mess that way.



In the Australian bush there is usually only one road in and out of a town. So if the local wildlife people decide to stake out a town to grab you, you usually have no feasible means of escape.

To get out of his spot of bother in Whyalla, South Australia, he released the reptiles he had in his possession and then drove back via little-known dirt tracks running several hundred kilometers further to avoid the noose. Then he drove to Melbourne via another back-route adding another 500 km to his round trip. He later said “I was like a (expletive) fugitive!”

This herp photographer had another near miss in the spring of 1997 when he went to Mount Isa in search of *Acanthophis wolffi*. They are those big red death adders found just to the south of the town in places like Djarra and Dutches.

Our man is notorious for having a “big mouth” and that is a common downfall for herpetologists. A few hundred kilometers north of Melbourne he pulled into a roadhouse in northern Victoria and told the attendant that he was going to Mount Isa to collect some death adders. He also made it clear that he’d be bringing home any that he found.

Like Steve Irwin on the TV, this man also loves to tell everyone that he’s the “best” snakeman around. Why did he tell the service station attendant all this? Well it was just a passing conversation as he filled up with petrol. And why should the conversation go any further?

But as any fauna official will tell you, reptile people are often their own worst enemies and in this case it was no different. You, see this herper had just put himself into the authorities. The service station attendant phoned the local police to tell them of a “wildlife smuggler” heading for Queensland and that was effectively the end of his latest herp capturing escapade. The police monitored his every movement as he traveled through NSW, and into Queensland capturing and photographing reptiles.

Many weren’t released. Why? First, he was bringing selected specimens back for his mates back in Melbourne. But of even greater importance is that it’s also necessary for him to retain the animals until after his films are processed—just in case the photos he takes don’t match his very high standards. By retaining the animals he always has a second (or even third) chance at getting the best photos he can.

At Mount Isa, the Queensland NPWS had been alerted to this unlicensed reptile collector and the police then forfeited their running of the operation to them. And yes, they spent the best part of a week covertly following their man.

It’s here that the herper got lucky. You see one of the fundamentals of many bureaucrats is that they are lazy. Another relevant fact is that many are merely money hungry scum, and so it was the case for these Queensland officials. You see they were called out to watch and then bust the herper for illegally collecting reptiles, preferably when he had a car full and was heading back south.

The reason for this is because the more they bust him for, the better it looks for them and the more likelihood they’ll get

a greater penalty against him when he finally fronts court. However the department refused to pay the enforcement officers “overtime” to do the bust. There was an internal dispute over the matter and senior management offered the workers “normal pay” to follow him for a few more days and then do the bust. But “normal pay” is only about half the “overtime” rate. In the end the officers told their superiors, “No overtime pay, no bust.”

There was no deal, and so the operation was terminated. Thus the herper was allowed to return to Melbourne with a car full of snakes and lizards.

Then the herper did what he always did. He set up a stage in his lounge-room and took yet more photos of the various snakes and lizards, waiting for his slides to return and then palming them off to other willing keepers in Melbourne.

Some have probably since been “laundered onto the books” as legally held and/or captive-bred reptiles. The remainder would have disappeared into that black-hole called the underground or black market.

Was he morally wrong to do what he did? In my view, no. In the overall scheme of things, the number of reptiles we are talking about is but a drop in the ocean. Not only that, but he was contributing to the overall body of knowledge about Australia’s reptiles, including little-known forms. Was he legally wrong? Most certainly. And if he’d been busted, he ran the very real risk of jail.

So what’s the moral to the story for all would-be reptile traffickers or even those who merely wish to take photos of reptiles without a permit? Remember—even that’s illegal in Australia. Keep your mouth shut! Tell no one. Even the mug who fills your car’s tank with petrol may be all that is needed to have you busted by an army of police and bureaucrats.

Or, as I mentioned in one of the *Smuggled* books, it was one tourist who overheard another talking to a friend in German (about smuggling) that led to the second one getting busted for posting lizards back home after the first one put him in to the police. And again I stress, remember, jail is a very likely consequence if you do get busted.

### More of the Same

In 1998, this same Melbourne-based herper decided to spend some time capturing critters at Groote Eylandt off the east coast of the Northern Territory. Like I said before, money was no object as his parents have bucket-loads and although he’s about thirty years old, he never actually has to work to pay the bills. In fact at the time of writing, he still lived at home with them.

He originally went to Groote Eylandt for just a few weeks. But then he liked it so much that he spent a few months there. As with most trips, he brought home some of the “more interesting” critters. Included was an (alleged) *Pailsus pailsei*. He found two on the trip and immediately knew that they were something unusual. One was a road-kill, which he photographed. The live one he promptly gave to another keeper in one of Melbourne’s southern suburbs. By the time I found out



about the snake, it had died.

Meanwhile the herper who caught the (alleged) *Pailsus* and had formerly been a good friend of mine had “black-listed” me. Why? In 1998 I formally described a few new species of death adders. And because I didn’t name any after him, he decided I was a (expletive). That also made my taxonomy “sh..house” (even though his actual grievance was about the nomenclature). Like I said before, in herpetology, the science is never as dramatic as the politics.

The irony of all this was that I had another paper about to be printed naming other new species of snakes, one of which was to be named after him. After the childish abuse meted out at me and a series of lies (mostly behind my back), I pulled the name and substituted another. What was that I said about how in herpetology, the science is never as dramatic as the politics?

### That Drug Bust

Then in March 2001 this person was busted with a stash of exotic reptiles that made the Pughs’ matters seem trivial by comparison. Actually he wasn’t exactly busted for exotics. Er, well, not in the first instance. Before the bust and using his skills as an electrician (Okay, so we’re talking about Rob Valentic), he wired up his new house in Donnybrook.

Not just for herps though. The house was wired up to grow a massive hydroponic marijuana crop. Not only that, but to avoid detection he bypassed the electricity meter box. This is actually fairly routine for illegal drug crops, so in as much as all this, none of what Rob did was all that exceptional, except perhaps for the scale. In law, the theft of the electricity is far worse than the drug crop itself!

Somehow the police got onto the crop and decided to do a raid. When they rocked up, they found a load of snakes that seemed a bit aggressive, so the local wildlife department were called in. As it happened, it was later revealed that the officials had “flexed” the day off. (This is a rort, whereby Australian bureaucrats use so-called “flexitime” to take days off work). The bureaucrats were tracked down and soon a collection of them and some local snake experts were brought to the house.

Now Rob was a licensed snake keeper so the fact that he had reptiles in his home wasn’t a matter for concern. However, some of the reptiles were! Besides his legally held locally occurring species, he had a number of illegal species, including Pilbara death adders (*Acanthophis wellsei*).

That was “bad.” What was worse was the fact that he also had a load of illegal exotic (non-native) species including Indian and Cape cobras (*Naja naja* and *N. nivea*), gaboon vipers (*Bitis gabonica*), Venezuelan rattlesnakes (*Crotalus durissus cumanensis*), puff adders (*Bitis arietans*) and yellow rat snakes (*Elaphe obsoleta quadrivittata*).

These were carted off to the City Zoo and Rob was set to be charged with various offenses. Fellow herpetologist Chris Hay was then raided and more illegal reptiles were seized.

The two men faced charges for the following:

- Illegal exotic reptiles (smuggling related charges)
- Illegal Australian reptiles (as above)
- Stealing electricity
- Growing a commercial (large) quantity of drugs
- Unlicensed guns at both houses

Now bearing in mind that for the smuggling charges alone the usual term of penalty is a year or two in jail and/or huge fines, the prognosis wasn’t good for the pair. Added to that the drugs matters and the government’s claims of zero-tolerance on illegal activities, neither man seemed to have much hope of escaping this pickle without serious repercussions.

The case came up for hearing in December the same year and the result was a bombshell. At the last moment, both men pled guilty to everything in a “no-contest.” In a decision that shocked the wildlife officials, the magistrate Alan Spillane refused to convict the men of any charges and gave them so-called “Good behavior bonds.” This meant that they effectively walked free from the court without penalty.

Why? This is a question that many people here have tried to answer and here are a few potential explanations. Word soon got around after the case that just prior to the hearing, \$40,000 was paid directly into Spillane’s TAB account. This was said to have been an inducement for the shock “decision” by Spillane. Approaches by myself to Spillane seeking an answer to the relevant questions were ignored. However, Spillane has for many years been known to be corrupt (refer to *The Hoser Files*, published in 1995 or *Victoria Police Corruption* - 2 published in 1999 for details).

As it happened, the judgment was fantastic news for virtually every other herper as it now meant that a legal “precedent” had been set and that a person caught doing some serious large-scale smuggling of reptiles could expect complete leniency from the courts. The reason for this is a thing known as “parity of sentence.” That is, if a person is sentenced to say five years jail for a crime, then another person found guilty in a court of law for doing the same thing should get the same sentence.

This meant that the Valentic/Hay case would be a precedent and that another person caught smuggling reptiles into Australia should expect the same (or no) penalty. The wildlife officials prosecuting the case knew all this and so in a rare move they formally appealed the result. In yet another shock for the wildlife officials, they lost their appeal.

The result: Rob and Chris walked free and other potential smugglers took the finding as a green light to start smuggling in reptiles.

Within weeks, masses of exotic reptiles started to show up at the Melbourne international mail exchange. One parcel found on 8 March 2002 had 11 more vipers and rattlesnakes. It was found in a random mail check at Melbourne’s Airmail Transit Centre. The customs declaration had “ceramic vase” written on it. The 45 cm snakes were held inside socks. It’d been sent from Sweden. A well-known snake from Nyngan,



New South Wales, was charged.

### In New South Wales

And it wasn't just in Victoria that the floodgates to exotic reptile imports were opened. The same thing happened elsewhere in Australia. There were loads of busts around Sydney. In 2001/2002 there was a series of NPWS/Police raids on keepers that yielded exotic reptiles. Based on the Hay/Valentic precedent, NPWS didn't bother charging most people because they knew that under "parity of sentence" they'd effectively be let off by the courts.

However there was one notable event that occurred. A collection in the Blue Mountains (west of Sydney) was seized. There were about 60 exotic and Australian snakes that all ended up at Sydney's Taronga Zoo. Shortly after arrival, two of the (Australian) jungle carpet pythons (*Morelia cheynei*) were found to have symptoms of inclusion-body disease (IBD) and were euthanized. They were necropsied and the IBD diagnosis was confirmed. As a result the rest of the snakes were also killed. NPWS sent out media releases and within a short time the story was garbled enough to imply that the foreign snakes had been found to have the disease.

Regardless of the truth, the case was used as an impetus by wildlife authorities across Australia to try again to put the exotic reptiles genie back into the bottle. For those who legally held such reptiles, they had additional license requirements imposed and wildlife authorities across the country became more vigilant in terms of seeking and seizing any exotic reptiles in private hands.

### Out West

Brad Maryan, the man the Western Australia Wildlife department (CALM) told the media was a criminal and a wildlife trafficker, actually turned out to be one of the "good guys." He eventually won the court case against CALM, although it cost him \$3,800. And CALM failed to gain a conviction against Brad Maryan, who was the man they wrongly portrayed as monster raping and pillaging our wildlife.

In 1998, the local wildlife officials did an armed raid on Maryan's place and cleaned out his reptile cages. It was a normal Australian-style sort of caper — government hoods running around stuffing snakes into bags and carting them off. The next day the papers ran the usual stories about Maryan being part of some international ring that was critically endangering our fauna. And then he was hit with a load of criminal charges.

The reptiles were then treated like dirt and started dropping off like flies, but then again the wildlife officials didn't care. Via the mass media they'd justified their existence and their highly paid jobs for another year or two.

And then in January 2000, Maryan was cleared by the courts of any serious wrongdoing and the department had a bit more egg on their face. They were told to return all Maryan's snakes. Did he get them back? No way. The wildlife depart-

ment had taxpayer's funds to burn so decided to take the matter all the way to the High Court of Australia. And while the appeal was being dragged through the courts, Maryan's remaining snakes continued to get sick and drop dead, one by one.

How much did that appeal to the High Court cost? Probably several hundred thousand dollars. Six months later, the wildlife department lost that case as well. But they didn't really care. Why? It wasn't their money they were spending. The taxpayer footed that bill as well. And yes, that's money the Australian government tells us is being spent on "conservation." Sure thing!

Where were the poor hapless reptiles, the alleged reason for the raid in the first place, being held? At a place called the Armadale Reptile center (ARC), which according to a detailed submission to the government by Brian Bush et al., dated 1 February 2000, is a mite-infested hole of a place which has had serious outbreaks of IBD and other notable reptile diseases. How do we know this? The autopsy reports by the government's own veterinary surgeons told us that.

So why did they raid Maryan in the first place? Well, he was an office bearer for the group known as WASAH, the West Australian Association of Amateur Herpetologists, and they'd been criticizing CALM's anti-conservation policies for years.

So what's the upshot of all this? Hopefully the WA government will finally bring in a reptile licensing system whereby people can legally keep snakes as pets and even trade with other states legally. The omens are good for the introduction of such a system. That's because unlike Western Australia, all the other mainland states and territories now have some sort of workable licensing systems for reptiles and the pressure is on to make the West Australian government step into line.

Oh, and there's the Section 92 argument as well. Anyone who's read *Smuggled*, would know that Section 92 of the Australian constitution expressly forbids impediments to interstate trade and at the moment the West Australian wildlife laws are illegal and unconstitutional because they serve to do this. While betting on when governments do things is a bit like trying rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic, my bet is that there'll be a workable licensing system in Western Australia operating by end 2001.

### But Do They Work?

Yes and no is the answer. Licensing systems only work properly when they are the most viable alternative for a majority of the law-abiding population. However that still isn't really the case here in Australia. Exotic (non-Australian) reptiles have long been put into the "too-hard" basket by authorities. A few years ago, customs effectively forfeited responsibility for exotic reptiles when they said that they'd only police the barriers (entry points) and not the whole country as they had previously. The change of policy was part of a wider industrial dispute whereby the bureaucracy was trying to get the government to employ more staff.



This changed the situation here: formerly one could be busted by customs, not only for illegally importing foreign reptiles, but also keeping them anywhere in Australia; under the new policy if you get them into the country without detection, you are safe from prosecution, even if later on the authorities find exotics in your home.

And so the trickle of exotic reptiles into the country became a flood. I know of some herpers here who have been getting incoming parcels of snakes on a daily basis for two or three years now and only been caught once or twice. The fines they got were worth less than the reptiles in the parcels. That was because the men pled guilty and then gave the presiding magistrates cock-and-bull stories about how the snakes were worthless, and the magistrates bought the lies.

The result of all this? More and more parcels of snakes coming into Australia. Now, we still pay more than the Europeans and the Americans for our ball pythons, Burmese or whatever, but the differential is dropping all the time and ones without paper (illegal ones) are only worth a few times more than what non-Australians pay.

The wildlife departments of New South Wales and Victoria have both made half-hearted attempts at filling the regulatory void that has emerged in terms of exotic herps. But they've made an even bigger mess of things because they failed to specify what their ground rules are. They keep saying they are looking at things and may bring in a new licensing system in future.

Rightly or wrongly, the word around the traps is that there may be an amnesty on foreign reptiles and so people are bringing in as many as they can in anticipation of such an amnesty in the hope that they can make a quick killing. By way of example, when NSW NPWS announced its amnesty for illegal reptiles a few years back, some herpers went bush for a month and caught everything they could. They claimed the whole lot on at the expiry of the amnesty and then commenced selling most of their (now legal) stock off. Some made thousands of dollars overnight.

## Two Heads

Here in Australia we make jokes about Tasmania. It's that small island state to the south of the mainland. Hardly anyone lives there and hardly anybody goes there. Why should they? It's a cold, miserable hole of a place with very few reptiles. Three kinds of snake only and not many more lizards. Australians joke about the Tasmanians and how they are allegedly inbred. Tasmanians are the butt of all the jokes about the kids having two heads and webbed feet.

Maybe even the Tasmanian wildlife department suffers from inbreeding. After all, how else can one explain such idiotic reptile laws? Just the day before I wrote this, I received a media release from the Tasmanian wildlife department justifying what are now among the most restrictive wildlife laws in the country. Residents there can only keep the three local species of snake (tiger, copperhead and white-lipped). Anything else is banned. In justifying this prohibition the Tasmanian department said it was concerned that snakes from

the mainland may become feral if allowed in Tasmania.

But can you image it? Scrub pythons overrunning the snow-capped peaks of Lake Pedder, perenties (*Varanus giganteus*) trampling the meadows of Launceston, or frill-necked dragons colonizing the Franklin Gorge. These things can't even survive in the wild in Victoria, so how are they meant to get a foothold in the even colder climes of Tasmania.

Methinks that the Tasmanian wildlife department's view of the world can only be reached by two-headed bureaucrats playing with themselves.

## But Do They Swim?

Another standing joke is that Geelong is proof that Tasmanians can swim. Geelong is a cold, wet, windy muck-hole of a town about an hour's drive south of Melbourne. It's also got a reputation as being an inbred hole of a town. Hence the jibe about Geelong and Tasmanians. Bendigo is another of that sort of town. But it's about an hour-and-a-half's drive northwest of Melbourne. Both towns have some top-class resident herpers, but then there are also those who may be of the two-headed variety.

Here's what I mean. Bendigo has about 70,000 people, give or take a few heads. It's one of those places where everyone knows everyone, or at least it seems that way. You could count the major snake collections in the town on both hands (using one head). So if you were a criminal and wanted to steal a snake or two, you wouldn't try to hock your stolen goods to someone else in the same town, would you?

But that's exactly what happened. Rob Jealous is one of the resident herpers from Bendigo. He's a mate of mine and nice bloke, but he had more than his fair share of bad luck in 2000. First he got picked up by the SA wildlife department when catching tiger snakes without a permit. I think he was just taking a few holiday photos, but in this country that's highly illegal. I don't know the end result of the case, but in this country to kill a snake is fine by the authorities, but to try to capture or study them is a "no-no."

Anyway he came back to his home of Bendigo and got a visit from a young bloke who said he was interested in buying some snakes off him. The next day Jealous was burgled and lost the lot. A few days later, Jealous was speaking to a mate of his, Drew Williams, who worked at a local pet shop, the Bendigo pet and reptile shop. And yes, they'd just bought a pile of cheap snakes including a few Bredl's pythons and elapids. It goes without saying that they'd been Jealous's snakes. The police were called in and this time they did their job and nabbed the thief.

Speaking of Bendigo, one of the local herpers, Darren Green (one head only), has been putting out a series of books on the keeping and breeding of commonly kept reptiles. Things like bearded dragons, tortoises and the like. The books are inexpensive and simple and great for new keepers. They're Australia's answer to the AVS and Barron's series.

In South Australia Paul Curtis was doing similar books, but it seems that he stopped doing them a while ago. My under-



standing is that the South Australian Herpetology Group (SAHG) is preparing to keep the books in production.

### **Gouldii Going the Way of *Panoptes***

Things in the west are going from bad to worse in terms of these monitors. In 1999, the ICZN used its plenary (read dictatorial) powers to declare the northern sand goanna as a new species, *Varanus panoptes*, and the southern variety *Varanus gouldii*. In fact the brand new type specimen of *Varanus gouldii* is from southwest Australia. So from a nomenclatural point of view we had the situation of *Varanus panoptes* being born, then exterminated by Wolfgang Böhme in 1992 and then resurrected by the ICZN in 1999. Thankfully that only involved a few name changes and not the actual lizards. But now the tide is turning against the lizards themselves. Wild specimens of the “new” *Varanus gouldii* as in the southwest Australian form have been getting exterminated at a rate of knots.

And, yes, it’s the government bureaucrats who are leading this extermination. So while you can’t get a permit to trap or keep one of these lizards from the government bureaucrats, their off-siders are out there killing them in droves.

How? In January 2001, zoologists said that the West Australian government’s ongoing management of sale and distribution of the toxic poison 1080 was killing vast numbers of native animals including scavengers and predators such as *Varanus gouldii*. Formerly, feral animals such as foxes and cats were controlled most effectively by shooters, who only killed the target animals. However with the advent of laws making gun ownership in Australia all but illegal, 1080 poisoning has become the preferred method of controlling these feral pests. Unfortunately the baits often miss their mark and get native predators instead, including the lizards. This is particularly so as the poison remains in the ecosystem for some time and may move up the food chain to animals that feed on poisoned animals.

### **More Extermination**

Frogs worldwide have been declining now for a few decades. But now scientists are onto the cause. Here in Australia (and most other places it seems), the main culprit seems to be the chytrid fungus and the likes of Gerry Marantelli at the Amphibian Research Centre (ARC) are working to find a cure.

The fungus wipes out frogs, not the tadpoles and so far attempts at finding a cure have failed. However Marantelli says that in the short term it seems that it may be easiest to find a cure for infected tadpoles, who carry the fungus but are not killed by it. If populations of chytrid-free frogs can be raised and maintained then they may be used as an insurance against unforeseen chytrid induced crashes of wild populations.

But then there’s the knock-on effect. Frog-eating reptiles have also taken a dive in number. Peter Mirtschin of Venom Supplies at Tanunda in South Australia and others have noticed a two or more decade drop in tiger snake (*Notechis scutatus*) numbers. In past years, the tiger snake was responsible for most Australian snakebite deaths, but this position is now

occupied by the eastern brown snake (*Pseudonaja textilis*). As the former’s numbers have declined the numbers of the latter have gone up, due to a general increase in the population of feral rats and mice, which is what the snakes feed on. (By the way, if you want a real brawl on taxonomy, start talking tiger snakes (*Notechis*). Here in Australia every herpetologist seems to have firm opinion on these snakes and yes, every one seems to be different).

Meanwhile in relatively remote areas of northern Australia, zoologist John Woinarski in 2000 said he found a sharp drop in wildlife numbers in the Kakadu National Park. The drops could not be explained by seasonal variations such as rainfall and based on CSIRO Research, indicated a serious long-term decline. While the studies concentrated on small native mammals, it was thought that the decline was also reflected in other animal groups such as the reptiles. It was thought that the declines across northern Australia from areas as far afield as Broome and Townsville was due to excessive and annual burning of grassland habitats as well as excessive grazing by farming stock, such as cattle, pigs and horses.

### **A Great Extermination**

Then there’s the cane toads (*Bufo marinus*). These are the invasive pests overrunning northern Australia. These critters were deliberately introduced by the government in the early part of last century by the thousands. Ostensibly the introduction was to control insect pests that ate sugar cane in North Queensland, in particular the so-called grayback cane beetle (*Dermolepida albobhirtum*). It was pretty stupid act really. You see the beetles fly and the toads don’t (unless you pick them up and throw them, which is cruel). So the toads gave up trying to eat the beetles and went feral instead, eating anything else they could. This included anything native that fitted in their mouths, including small snakes, other frogs and the like.

In the law of the jungle, or should I say Australian bush, it is “eat or be eaten” and so things bigger than the toads tried to eat them. The toads carry toxic poison in glands over their skin, in particular at the back of the head. Thus animals that ate the toads died.

Frog-eating snakes and the like really took a tumble, with some local populations even being exterminated. The flow-through effect went through species who under normal circumstances wouldn’t have contact with frogs (or now the toads). And yes, the toads have also been found to be an important vector for the chytrid fungus, which we now know to have caused the extinctions of numerous native frogs in Queensland.

Now in 1987, I tried to spearhead a major campaign to have the toads exterminated from Australia. I had series of letters published in major city newspapers, wildlife magazines and everywhere else I could get exposure. I got myself on radio and TV again calling for extermination of these pests. UK readers may recall seeing one of the letters from 1997 published in the *Herptile* 12(3), pp. 86-87. It opened saying “One of the greatest ongoing threats to Australian herpeto-



fauna remains largely ignored. It is the cane toad (*Bufo marinus*).

The net result of all this? In one word “Nothing.” Instead of getting support from the government I was vilified. One government employee wrote to the major news outlets and said that I was an idiot who didn’t know what I was talking about and that the toads were “no threat” to any native species. Other bureaucrats also vilified me publicly for campaigning against the toads. My calls for a biological control to exterminate the toads were written off as “a waste of public money.” My assertion that if nothing was done by the government, then within decades the toads would march on to Kakadu and beyond was written off as “fantasy.”

And so the march of the toads continued. Fast forward to 2001 (14 years later) and I picked up the daily papers on Thursday, 18 January. An Australian Associated Press (AAP) news release said that government employed biologists had gone into panic mode over the impending invasion by cane toads of the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park. The first toads were expected in the park within weeks and the so-called “experts” were now claiming that they didn’t have enough time to do anything useful to stop the invasion.

Numerous endemic species of frog and reptile were now at risk. Oh and yes, the people from the government who develop biological controls against pests said that they could develop a biological weapon to attack and possibly eliminate the toads, but would need between 5 and 10 years to do so. Maybe if the government officials in charge of wildlife had taken heed of my warnings 14 years ago, the toad invasion of Kakadu would never have occurred.

What was that I said before about wildlife bureaucrats actually wanting animals to become rare and endangered and remaining so in order that they can justify their existence? Well as the toads rape and pillage species in their wake, more reptiles and frogs will become rare and endangered, thereby enabling an ever larger army of bureaucrats to justify their existence.

On that basis is it any wonder that I was vilified all those years ago and even now, no government in Australia is seri-

ously trying to tackle to cane toad problem? Less toads means less rare and endangered wildlife and that means we’d need less bureaucrats to run around enforcing laws against those who may try to keep or breed these newly endangered species.

## Kids

After my wife gave birth to our daughter, a number of friends suggested I feed Adelyn to their snake. And yes the papers regularly carry stories of young kids being eaten up by pet snakes or monsters from the bush. Such as the case in the United States heard in court in March 2000 where 3-year-old Jessie Altom was virtually gobbled up by her parent’s pet African rock python (*Python sebae*). Robert Altom, 26, and his wife, Melissa, 21, were charged with child endangerment and keeping a dangerous animal, the seven and a half foot African rock python, in their home in Centralia, Illinois. You’ll find details the case at: <http://www.kingsnake.com/forum/python/messages/33981.html>.

But there was at least one near miss in Australia 2000. On Friday 17 March 2000, a three-year-old boy narrowly escaped death after a large python attacked him in his bed at Cooktown, north Queensland. As reported by the AAP the boy survived, but the family pet silky terrier was not so lucky. The boy’s father, Mr Terry Wiseman, later told ABC radio: “He didn’t even cry after the initial snake bite. He didn’t even cry when bitten. I’d be screaming my head off, but he’s a brave little fella, you know.

Mr. Wiseman said the snake might have strangled the boy if the family had not found it first. “If nobody came to the scene, the snake would probably have got around the Benson’s neck and it would have been a few minutes and he would have been gone. But the snake was obviously on a killing rampage because it didn’t crush the dog ready to eat, it just strangled it and there wasn’t even a broken bone in its body. It then just went into the cot and started biting his hand.” AAP ended the story stating, “The python was later found in the Wiseman home and killed.”

And that accurately sums up the official Australian attitude to snakes — the only good snake is a dead one.

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## Some Cases of Herpetological Misinformation

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Anybody with more than a passing interest in reptiles and amphibians is well aware of the abundance of herpetological misperceptions, half-truths, and outright lies that spread, seemingly inexorably, by word of mouth and through the media. It is our responsibility to counteract this misinformation when possible, in a way that we hope fosters greater sym-

pathy rather than antagonism toward herpetology and herpetological enthusiasts. Perhaps it is the teacher in me that found the following cases particularly interesting (or perhaps it is the teacher in me that compels me to point them out). One is subtle and easily overlooked; the other is more disturbing because it masquerades as professional scholarship.



(1) The calls of frogs are often used to add atmosphere to musical recordings and motion picture soundtracks. On the CD *New Moon Daughter* by Cassandra Wilson (1995), a chorus of spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) has been added to Wilson's cover of Neil Young's *Harvest Moon*; in the liner notes, credit for background vocals is given to "The Peepers." It took me some time to recognize the seasonal disparity in this combination. The harvest moon occurs at about the time of the autumnal equinox in September. Although spring peepers occasionally call in the fall (Vogt, 1981), their choruses are, of course, most strongly associated with the late winter or early spring.

(2) Jones (2000) has provided from the perspective of an anthropologist a possible explanation for the dragon as an almost universal image in human cultures. He has proposed that the dragon represents an amalgamation of three important primate predators: the serpent, the raptor and the feline. I found this hypothesis interesting, but I don't wish to comment on the overall merits of the book. Unfortunately, inaccuracies in the author's treatment of snakes detract from my confidence in the material he presents in areas with which I am less familiar.

On page 34, Jones (2000) briefly surveys snakes as predators on modern primates. No published sources of information are cited in this portion of the text, although Ditmars (1931) is included in the bibliography at the end of the book. Jones (2000) states that reticulated pythons (*Python reticulatus*) average thirty-three to thirty-four feet in length (my emphasis added), certainly an overestimate of the mean. Conversely, he also states that the largest known specimen of the anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*) measured nineteen feet in length, certainly an understatement of the maximum size (e.g., see Murphy and Henderson, 1997). He states that boa constrictors of the family Boinae [sic] can reach twenty feet in length and are found "all over the world," including "New Guinea, Australia, Asia, Malaysia, Africa, Mexico, India, and Madagascar." The maximum size may be an overestimate (Murphy and Henderson, 1997), and the geographic imprecision brings to mind a recent television program I stumbled across one night, during which a "snake buster" from Florida mentioned in an aside on camera that he had caught in the Philippines an anaconda over thirty feet long.

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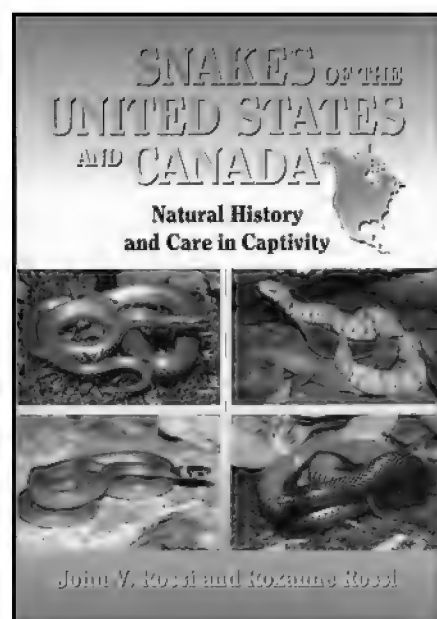
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### **Book Review: *Snakes of the United States and Canada: Natural History and Care in Captivity* by John V. Rossi and Roxanne Rossi. 2003. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company xxxvi + 520 pp. ISBN 1-57524-031-9. \$145.00**

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There are many books on captive care of North American snakes. What separates John and Roxanne Rossi from other authors is their assertion that "there is no such thing as a 'junk' snake." Indeed, most snake keepers focus on king-snakes, ratsnakes, boas and pythons, while ignoring any species that aren't large, brightly colored and rodent-eating. In fact the generally smaller, plainer, non-rodent-eating group accounts for an astonishing 90% of the fifty genera of snakes in the United States and



Canada. This book balances the Rossis' extensive experience keeping and breeding almost every species of native snake with their far-ranging field experience and a review of the natural history literature, all in a single volume filled with dozens and dozens of beautiful color photographs.

The Rossis' first two volumes (Rossi, 1992; Rossi and Rossi, 1995) discussed keeping and breeding eastern and western North American snake species, respectively. The new volume incorporates both groups in a single text and, unlike the previous versions, adds a considerable amount of natural history data pertaining to captive husbandry. The authors describe their book as "one of the first books in over 40 years to discuss the natural history of almost all North American snakes in one volume." Knowledge of natural history information is



essential to successful captive maintenance, so this addition is both useful and welcome. “Space constraints” force the authors to exclude “meristic characters, micromorphological details, detailed descriptions of subspecies and tables of data” as might be found in a text strictly about snake natural history, concentrating instead on data that relate to snakes in captivity. They also focus on their own personal observations, field observations by both amateur and professional herpetologists, and reports from regional publications as sources of information. As a result, this is a useful and practical reference for anyone who keeps snakes from the United States and Canada. It is of particular value to those who keep species not traditionally thought of as pets, such as ring-necked snakes, night snakes, whipsnakes, long-nosed snakes, and the like. Nevertheless, keepers of the more popular ratsnakes, kingsnakes, gophersnakes and gartersnakes also are likely to learn a thing or two.

The book begins with typical acknowledgments, foreword and introduction. A 12-page section offers an overview of the natural history of snakes. This superficially covers topics such as skull kinesis, venom composition, fang morphology, special senses, visceral organs, locomotion, systematics, food chains, geographic distribution, habitat types, ecologic niches, reproductive strategies, thermoregulation and brumation. Obviously ophidian natural history is extremely complex and has been the subject of countless textbooks and journal articles. This brief overview is appropriate for this type of book, but no references are supplied other than a short list of general references at the end of the section. This is in contrast to the heavily referenced individual species accounts. A three-page discussion of conservation and factors that threaten snake populations follows. Finally, there is a single-page table listing North American snake genera.

Part One consists of 75 pages titled “Keeping Snakes: General Care.” The topics presented are generally useful and practical. The Rossis begin with housing, using the premise that the cage should be set up and ready before a new snake is brought home. Additional topics include choosing a snake, prepurchase exam, capturing a snake, transport, cleaning and disinfection, temperature, humidity and water, ventilation, lighting, substrate, feeding, psychological factors, winter cooldown (brumation), sexing, breeding, care of eggs, care of juveniles, handling, records, warning signs, first aid, releasing snakes, and general guidelines. Some of this is general information; some of it is found nowhere else. For instance, additional setups to the basic cage are described for various species—a wet/dry enclosure setup, a three-layer setup, a desert setup and a swamp tea setup. The latter is a wonderful innovation first described in Rossi (1992) for aquatic snakes prone to dermatitis in damp environments. Strangely, the specific details of the swamp tea setup are provided within the striped crayfish snake, *Regina alleni*, species account in Part Two rather than here in the housing section, which would be a more logical place for it. Other species also use such a setup, and this placement of the description forces some paging back and forth. As an aside, Barnett (2001) describes the amphibian enclosures developed at the National Aquarium in Baltimore. These consist of glass aquariums with drain holes cut in the bottoms and stoppered drain tubes attached to the holes. Short

rings of PVC pipe are placed on the empty aquarium bottom to hold up a plastic “egg crate” light-diffusing panel, which is overlaid with fiberglass window screen, a layer of gravel and finally any of a variety of substrates. This setup allows simple, thorough cleaning of complex, naturalistic environments, facilitates efficient cleaning of banks of cages, and could easily be incorporated to some of these authors’ naturalistic setup recommendations. The Rossis’ section on outdoor enclosures is an interesting idea often applied to turtles and lizards but heretofore rarely used in snakes. Hopefully readers of this book will experiment with outdoor snake enclosures more frequently. The emphasis on cleaning and disinfection is a strong point of the chapter, as many keepers and husbandry references do not stress cleaning and disinfection enough. Too often snake keepers learn the importance of disinfection only after they have suffered a disease outbreak in their collection. The sections on breeding, egg rearing and first aid are practical and loaded with useful tips and suggestions.

Parts Two and Three are titled, respectively, “Nonvenomous Snakes: Natural History and Care in Captivity,” and “Venomous Snakes: Natural History and Care in Captivity.” These both consist of individual species accounts arranged alphabetically by genus and species. Each account contains one to eight color photographs with few exceptions. A range map for each species is provided, although the authors point out in the introduction that depicted ranges are approximations and that regional field guides should be consulted for more detailed information. The natural history of each species is summarized, including descriptions of species and subspecies, home range, habitat, diet, predators, thermal requirements, and reproductive data. Most of this data, with the exception of lists of predators, refers to or could apply to snakes in captivity. Literature citations are heavily supplemented with the Rossis’ vast personal experience with snakes both in captivity and in the wild. Finally, each species account, with the single exception of the yellow-bellied seasnake, *Pelamis platurus*, contains a short table listing useful data about that species. Each table records the scientific and common names, the Rossis’ unique but valuable “maintenance difficulty index” between 1 and 5 (1 = easiest, 5 = most difficult), average size and food. Recommendations for cage size, substrate, ventral heat, UV light, and temperature range are followed by special considerations. The latter often lists typical behavior tendencies, such as shyness, aggression or restlessness, or physical characteristics, such as propensity to dehydration or skin infections. The need for permits to keep certain species also is listed here, but the list is incomplete (e.g., the western hog-nosed snake, *Heterodon nasicus*, and Great Plains rat snake, *Elaphe guttata emoryi*, are protected in Illinois but not many other states; these two accounts do not include a mention of permits) and specific reasons for protection are not always clear. Some species accounts list “permit required,” some “permit required in some states,” and some “protected by law.” It is not clear which species are federally protected, which are protected by individual states and which are prohibited due to dangerous animal laws. Confusingly, permits are listed as required for each venomous species native to Florida, including the copperhead, *Agkistrodon contortrix*, cotton-



mouth, *Agkistrodon piscivorus*, eastern diamond-backed rattlesnake, *Crotalus adamanteus*, timber rattlesnake, *Crotalus horridus*, and eastern coralsnake, *Micrurus fulvius*. In contrast, other venomous snakes, including the western coralsnake, *Micruroides euryxanthus*, and other non-endangered rattlesnakes are not said to require permits. In these cases the permit requirements might refer to Florida state laws only — the authors' home state — because all of these species are found in other states and are not protected at the federal level. Obviously state and local laws regulating threatened, endangered and venomous species vary considerably. Keepers might need a more detailed resource than this book to reference applicable laws.

The book concludes with a 22-page reference list, an appendix listing common and scientific names at the species level, and an index.

The illustrations are a highlight of the book. The photographs in the first two editions were clustered on a few pages in the center of each book with six or seven tiny, postage-stamp-sized photographs per page. This necessitated paging back and forth between the species accounts and the photo section. In the new edition, the photographs are distributed within each species account and most illustrations are as wide as the page. There are only a few species not depicted. For instance, eastern and western wormsnares, *Carphophis amoenus* and *C. vermis*, are discussed together with only a photograph of the former. Likewise, there is only a line drawing of the mountain shovelnose snake, *Chionactis saxatilis*, although the Committee on Standard English and Scientific Names (2000) placed this as a synonym to *Chionactis occipitalis annulata*, which is represented in a color photograph. The Concho watersnake, *Nerodia paucimaculata*, is not illustrated. Even though a number of the photographs used here first appeared in the Rossis' first two editions, most are of good quality. A few contain unnatural backgrounds, such as blacktop road, grass or newspaper, and a small number suffer from uneven lighting or narrow depth of field. Coins also are used too frequently as size references; these are distracting and a millimeter rule would be more accurate. As a very minor point, a handful of beautiful species are represented only by close-ups of the head instead of showing more of the snakes' bodies. Examples include both species of indigo snakes, *Drymarchon*, and the California mountain kingsnake, *Lampropeltis zonata*. Still, the photographs overall are attractive and their liberal use must have contributed to the relatively high price of this book.

The authors write in an informal, conversational style as opposed to the more formal, scientific tone used by Wright and Wright (1957) and Ernst and Barbour (1989). This will be appreciated by snake keepers who are not scientists. Indeed, the brevity of both the overview on natural history and the natural history data presented within individual species accounts suggests that snake keepers are the target audience, as opposed to professional biologists and herpetologists. A quick review of Rossi (1992) and Rossi and Rossi (1995) reveals that certain parts and several tables from the first two volumes have been repeated almost word for word in Part One of this

book. There is nothing wrong with that; it isn't always necessary to reinvent the wheel. Parts Two and Three contain so much new natural history information that repetition from the first two volumes is far less noticeable.

Constructive criticism of the Rossi's first two volumes was raised in certain book reviews. Complaints of poor editing and awkward phrasing (Rundquist, 1993) and grammatical errors, misspellings, anthropomorphic language and odd terminology (Lyman-Henley, 1996) largely have been heeded; all of these areas have been improved upon. Nevertheless a quick perusal finds too many examples of these mistakes remaining. The authors state "Untreated wood is basically undisinfectable" on page 18, although on page 3 it is said more clearly: "Untreated wood . . . is nearly impossible to disinfect." On page 111, Panacur (a commonly used medication to treat nematode parasites) at a dose of "50-100 mg" is described as "probably the safest drug" for treating the Kirtland's snake, *Clonophis kirtlandii*. This should read "50-100 mg *per kg body weight*;" ironically a total dose of 50 to 100 mg in this tiny snake would likely cause toxicity or even death. The description of indigo snakes begins with the nonsensical phrase, "Glossy iridescents [sic] black snake, the indigo . . ." The text of the cornsnake account lists two subspecies as the Great Plains ratsnake, *Elaphe guttata emoryi*, and *Elaphe guttata meahllmorum*, no common name. However the captions for the accompanying photographs list northern plains rat snake, *Elaphe emoryi emoryi*, and southern plains rat snake, *Elaphe emoryi meahllmorum*. The former follows the nomenclature of the Committee on Standard English and Scientific Names (2000), while the latter follows Collins (1997), which the authors otherwise use throughout the book. Under mud snakes it states, "Presently two species are recognized," where it should read "two *sub*-species." There are two species of *Farancia* but only a single species of mudsnake, *Farancia abacura*. The caption for the western massasauga photo misspells the species name "*catentus*" instead of "*catenatus*." Mudsnakes are described as "chunky" and southern hog-nosed snakes as "pudgy" — unscientific, perhaps, but in line with the conversational writing style.

A number of tables in the book list snakes by common name and are arranged awkwardly. The likely reason for using common names instead of scientific names in tables is that many snake keepers are unfamiliar with the latter. Nevertheless, the species accounts are arranged alphabetically by scientific name, making the choice for tables inconsistent with the body of the book. Moreover, the authors follow the common and scientific names suggested in Collins (1997), even though more updated publications on herpetological nomenclature (e.g., Committee on Standard English and Scientific Names, 2000) existed at the time of writing. An update to Collins (1997), Collins and Taggart (2002), also was published before this book, but perhaps after preparation of the manuscript. To be fair, new proposals are not always immediately and universally accepted and nomenclature is in a constant state of flux. Nevertheless, differences between Collins (1997), Committee on Standard English and Scientific Names (2000) and Collins and Taggart (2002) are more pronounced among common names than scientific ones, hence the use of



common names in tables raises occasional confusion. Making things even more confusing, the authors alphabetize snake names in their tables by the adjective name rather than the family name, so eastern ribbonsnake is listed under “e” for “eastern” rather than “r” for ribbonsnake. Table 1 lists recommended enclosure sizes for each snake species and places “rat snakes” under “r,” as might be expected. However Table 4, Temperature Ranges, lists ratsnakes under “c” for “common rat snake.” In Table 5, Reproduction Chart, we find both gartersnakes and kingsnakes under “c” for “common garter snake” and “common kingsnake” respectively, but here ratsnake is under “e” for “eastern rat snake.” The ratsnake species account describes the common name for *Elaphe obsoleta* as “common rat snake” rather than “eastern rat snake,” so the latter term is probably in error. I disagree with the inclusion of Table 7, Most Commonly Used Drugs in Snakes. Most of these drugs are available only by prescription and should be used only under a veterinarian’s direction, and thus the reported doses have little bearing in this non-medical book. It is all too common for untrained snake keepers to obtain prescription drugs and use them for incorrectly self-diagnosed cases, or in inappropriate ways or dosages. This is to the detriment of the snake patient; if the wrong drug at the wrong dose isn’t directly harmful, the delay in accurate diagnosis and treatment surely is. Veterinarians will find drug dosages in numerous, more specific books and articles on reptile medicine and surgery.

The tables only list temperatures in the Celsius scale, with no Fahrenheit equivalents. While the use of metric units is universal in scientific publications, this book seems directed towards American snake keepers who are more likely used to the Fahrenheit scale. A conversion table or formula ( $(^{\circ}\text{C} \times 9/5) + 32 = ^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) would have been useful. Interestingly, throughout the species accounts all temperatures are reported in both Celsius and Fahrenheit scales.

The Appendix of Common to Scientific Names could have been perhaps the most useful table in the book, allowing readers to match a common name with the alphabetically listed scientific name in the species accounts. The appendix is hard to find between a lengthy reference list and index in the back of the book, and might have been better placed in the front of the book. Organizationally, the appendix is a mess. Blind-snakes (changed to threadsnakes by Committee on Standard English and Scientific Names [2000]) are listed twice: under “b” for “blind snake, Texas” and “blind snake, western,” but also under both “t” for “Texas blind snake” and “w” for “western blind snake.” A confusing double entry is the listing of two names for one snake: Texas indigo snake, *Drymarchon corais erebennus*, and western indigo snake, *Drymarchon corais*. The species account uses the former. There are seven unrelated snake species listed under “e” for “eastern” and nine under “w” for “western.” The perplexing result is that coral-snakes, diamond-backed rattlesnakes, foxsnakes, hog-nosed snakes, and so on are grouped together. It might have been more logical to list all the gartersnakes together under “g,” all the rattlesnakes under “r,” all the watersnakes under “w,” and so on. Instead these are spaced out all over the appendix according to their description. Omissions also exist, since

neither western rattlesnake, prairie rattlesnake, nor Mojave rattlesnake is listed. This appendix could have been very useful but was poorly executed.

Most topics are discussed to reflect the authors’ experience rather than a thorough review of the topic. To be sure, they have unusually broad experience and success with virtually every species of native snake, and the resulting information is quite valuable. The result of this approach, however, is more of a “we-did-this-and-it-worked” statement than a comprehensive description of every available option. For instance, in the discussion of sand as a substrate, we are told that white play sand and builder’s sand can be used without problems, while beach sand, which may be excessively salty, is recommended against. The facts that certain kinds of sand can be excessively abrasive or that silica sand can cause irritation of the lungs are not mentioned. Under temperature, supplemental heat in the form of heating pads, “other heating devices,” heating cables and heating strips are recommended for most snakes. Incandescent lights are also said to be adequate for many snakes, while active species are said to need both forms of heat. From their discussion, it is obvious that these are the products used by the authors. The recommendations for thermal gradients and complex thermal environments certainly are beneficial, but additional heating products — all commonly used by herpetoculturists — are not mentioned. Examples include ceramic bulbs that emit heat but no light, radiant heat panels, thermostats with temperature probes and features to allow a drop in night temperature, and infrared remote thermometers.

The Rossis offer extensive recommendations on how to induce snakes that might normally eat hard-to-find prey, such as spiders, centipedes, fish and amphibians, to accept scented domestic mice or crickets. The obvious advantages of this practice are availability and less chance of transmitting parasites, while the obvious disadvantage is that these items might not provide balanced nutrition for species that do not normally consume them. Lyman-Henley (1996) specifically questioned this approach as possibly being more convenient for the keeper rather than beneficial for the captive snake, noting the irony of these suggestions in a book focused on species-specific husbandry. In the current edition, buried in the middle of a paragraph about feeding beaten egg to certain species (page 31), and out of context with the rest of the paragraph, is the warning that “all these methods of feeding treachery [the choice of the word “treachery” suggests that changing diets is not a good thing] on your part may not result in a balanced diet for your snake;” such methods, we are told, should be used to stretch a normal diet rather than act as a substitute diet. The use of the phrase “all of these methods” implies that the Rossis are referring to all feeding of unnatural diets, and not the single practice of feeding beaten egg to a few small species described in the paragraph. Many readers will miss this important warning and it should have been emphasized. Nevertheless, the Rossis go on to boast that all their watersnakes have been successfully switched from eating fish to diets consisting entirely of mice, so that their use of fish has dropped to zero.

The venomous snake section, Part Three, contains advice on general care and safety based on the authors’ own experi-



ence. Strict venomous snake handling protocols have been developed by zoos to standardize techniques, prevent accidental bites and efficiently deal with bites when they occur (for instance: Altimari, 1998; Flanagan, 1999; Boyer et al., 2003), but these protocols are not referenced or detailed here. A few techniques that the authors fail to mention include the need for formal training in venomous snake keeping and handling, the use of double screens for cage ventilation to prevent accidental fang penetration by striking snakes, the need to use hooks of adequate length to prevent the snake from reaching the handle, keeping the hook angled less than 45 degrees from the vertical so that the snake cannot slide up towards the handle, Plexiglas shields for protection while working in the cage, spoons on handles for cage cleaning, and many more. For antivenin sources, the authors recommend simply contacting the local hospital to find out if they have any, without suggesting alternatives if they don't. Hospitals located outside the range of venomous snakes are unlikely to stock antivenin. Likewise, hospitals are unlikely to have antivenin for species not native to their area. The authors fail to mention that antivenin is a prescription drug, that it costs hundreds of dollars per vial, that multiple vials are necessary to treat any bite, and that most antivenin has a relatively short expiration date. The authors mention that "professional facilities" — presumably zoos — keep antivenin on hand, which suggests that it is available to the public, but that may not always be the case. Poison control hotlines would be one good reference for locating antivenin supplies. After a bite occurs, valuable time can be lost if the closest antivenin has not already been located. The authors also fail to recommend that local emergency rooms be informed what species of venomous snakes are kept so they can be prepared in the event of an accidental bite. Most emergency room physicians where venomous snakes are not locally common have never treated a case of snakebite. Forewarning them of what might be presented could save time researching treatment in the event of an accident. The reference to the section on handling venomous snakes that appears in Part One is listed only at the very end of this section and could easily be overlooked by readers. To be fair, this section is like the natural history section in the front of the book: a brief overview rather than a comprehensive reference. Nevertheless, the result is that experienced venomous snake keepers won't find anything new in this section, while novice keepers won't find nearly enough information here.

The Rossis have always promoted captive breeding of snakes as a conservation tool, both to have a reservoir of specimens in captivity and also to have a population available

for possible future release into the wild. In this volume the Rossis discuss "Releasing Snakes (How, Why and When Not To)" with more insight than the previous editions, listing several important factors to consider. They mention, correctly, that some reptiles might carry contagious diseases even though they appear healthy, and the resulting threat to native populations is a strong argument against the release of captives. They also express concern over the possible introduction of foreign genes into the local gene pool, although they go on to suggest a "positive survival value of gene flow." The rest of this section discusses what to do once the decision to release a snake has been made. In fact, apparent clinical health and knowing a point of origin may not be enough information on which to base the decision whether or not to release a snake. Stringent scientific protocols have been devised for making the decision whether or not to release other reptiles (Jacobson et al., 1999) that could and should be adapted for snakes. A recent report (Fleming et al., 2003) of cytoplasmic inclusions in cornsnakes resembling viral inclusion body disease of boid snakes is a sobering reminder that many poorly understood and previously unreported diseases exist in snakes, and these diseases are poised to affect native populations. Moreover, the authors themselves acknowledge in their introduction (page xv) that "early studies examining the survivorship of released individuals indicate that survivorship has been fairly low." No references are listed, but this information should have been discussed at greater length in the section covering releasing snakes in Part One.

While not without its problems, *Snakes of the United States and Canada: Natural History and Care in Captivity* is packed with detailed, practical information concerning the care of North American snakes in captivity. Much of this information is on species not normally kept as pets and appears nowhere else. The inclusion of every species of snake from the United States and Canada makes this book stand alone. There are many useful tips and warnings based on the Rossis' vast experience concerning which techniques work and which ones are likely to fail. There are many unique ideas in terms of cage design and outdoor enclosures for snakes. As a veterinarian, I often advise my clients to seek advice from experienced herpetoculturists on how to provide for their pets, reasoning that experienced keepers have already worked out solutions to common problems. I doubt that anyone has more experience and success keeping — and breeding — virtually every North American snake than do the Rossis. As a result, their advice is valuable indeed. Unfortunately, the price of the book might discourage casual readers.

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*Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc.* 38(12):246-248, 2003

## HerPET-POURRI

by Ellin Beltz

### Hoppy Holidays!

So ends another year of writing columns for the CHS *Bulletin*, a task undertaken first in 1987 when my daughter was eleven years old. She is now married and buying a house. Time flies and things change. I probably wouldn't know half the people at CHS meetings anymore; since we moved to California two and a half years ago, I haven't been to a single CHS meeting. Quite a change from before we left to when I didn't miss a single one for more than a dozen years! Please do send clippings, notes, letters and cards. This column depends on reader input and recognizes everyone who contributes. Send your contributions with the date/publication slug firmly attached to each piece to: Ellin Beltz, POB 1125, Ferndale, CA 95536-1125. This month, I've done a search of interesting amphibian and reptile stories reported in the past couple of weeks on the World Wide Web.

### Quote of the month

"The Sun is like a snake that sheds its skin," says the author of the report in the *Astrophysical Journal* which describes how the Sun changes its magnetic field from positive to negative. He added, "In this case, it's a magnetic skin. The process is long, drawn-out and it's pretty violent. More than a thousand coronal mass ejections, each carrying billions of tons of gas from the polar regions, are needed to clear the old magnetism away. But when it's all over the Sun's magnetic stripes are

running in the opposite direction." [British Broadcasting Service, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3226844.stm>]

### A year without snake soup . . .

"Hong Kong's snake industry is suffering a severe shortage after mainland authorities banned exports during the SARS outbreak when it was thought the respiratory illness was spread by wildlife in southern China. The global epidemic was declared under control in July, and snakes have a clean bill of health, but the ban still stands. Chinese officials have told Hong Kong snake dealers it's a conservation measure but the merchants are not so sure. . . . China is Hong Kong's top source of snakes, shipping about 67,000 every year, and traders are having to defrost last year's leftovers and import snakes from Southeast Asia at prices up to 20% higher. . . . Some restaurants keep snakes coiled up in cages, ready to be killed and cooked on demand. But this season many are dropping snake from their menus. . . . Serpents apparently had nothing to do with SARS, which claimed 299 lives in Hong Kong, but some are avoiding snake anyway." Ireland On-Line, December 5, 2003, <http://breakingnews.iol.ie/news/story.asp?j=87757212&p=877579y8>

### Fangs for the profits

"Biotech firm Protherics has narrowed its losses after sales of its rattlesnake bite antidote [CroFab] almost doubled during the



first half of the year. . . . Protherics won market share with the first new antidote for rattlesnake bites in about fifty years. [Their] Chief executive . . . said Protherics hoped to treat around one half of all rattlesnake bite victims in the current financial year, compared with around a third last year, and said profit margins on the £5800 treatment course had climbed to about 40 per cent from 30 per cent last year. `We see continued top and bottom line growth from CroFab for the next one to two years at least,' [he] said. Protherics has also reached an agreement with United States regulators that would reduce the size, time, and cost of final phase III clinical trials for CytoFab, its experimental treatment for severe infections." [Business Scotsman, December 5, 2003, <http://www.business.scotsman.com/technology.cfm?id=1329172003>]

### **Smiley's frogs found**

Children playing on a cattle ranch have found the first California red-legged frogs seen in Calaveras County, California, in the past 34 years. Researchers are checking other ranches in the area to see if more frogs live there as well. The frogs were made famous by Mark Twain's short story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." Associated Press reports: "The unofficial Frogtown mayor who managed the Calaveras County Fair and Frog Jumping Jubilee until he retired this year, led local opposition to [red-legged frog] re-introduction plans. He feared it would force landowners to kill off the bullfrog, brought in from east of the Rockies more than a century ago after San Franciscans devoured much of the state's red-legged frog population. The bullfrogs since have taken over much of the red-legged frog's habitat, and are the preferred frog used at the annual jumping contest named after Twain's fictional 1865 challenge in the Angels Camp Hotel bar. Twain frequented the bar while he lived in nearby Jackass Hill. Habitat loss, climate change, ultraviolet radiation and windblown pesticides, along with competition, are blamed for shrinking the historic range of the largest native Western frog species by about 70 percent. Most of the remaining red-legged frogs are along California's north-central coast." [December 2, 2003]

### **I want to hold your toepad?**

File this under something I didn't know before, but ex-Beatle, Sir Paul McCartney besides being a world famous musician and composer is also an animator. Miramax has purchased the rights to a film McCartney made titled "Rupert and the Frog King" and will also release two other pieces, one of which is called "The Frog Chorus" on the DVD. [Anova, December 3, 2003. [http://www.ananova.com/entertainment/story/sm\\_843938.html](http://www.ananova.com/entertainment/story/sm_843938.html)]

### **"Toad tossing blacks out town"**

It was one of those headlines a dyslexic shouldn't try to read. What they meant was "Pranksters hurling cane toads into powerlines have been blamed for two [electrical] black-outs . . . [in] two separate incidents in which cane toads connected by copper wire appeared to have been thrown into high and low voltage powerlines affecting power . . . [to] about 850 customers. [Townsville, Australia, *Bulletin*, December 3, 2003, [http://www.news.com.au/common/story\\_page/](http://www.news.com.au/common/story_page/)

0,4057,8051867%255E26462,00.html]

### **Free pets, or pests?**

Three Canadians reported finding black-widow spiders in their groceries. In the past year, a woman in Ottawa found a green tree frog and a young man in Hamilton found a "tiny speckled lizard clinging to a bunch of bananas." The London, Ontario, *Free Press*, reports that "People who want pesticide-free fruit should be prepared to battle the bugs. The black widow spiders in grapes are likely the result of tough anti-pesticide rules in California. . . . Black widows can't be eliminated without killing other spiders that are the natural predators of harmful insects that destroy fruit. [December 6, 2003]

### **Real or just a slow news day?**

On November 21, 2003, Reuters reported that at Rangamati, 135 miles south of the Bangladesh capital, Dhaka: "A python killed and half-swallowed a woman in southeastern Bangladesh, police said. . . . [The 38-year-old woman] was collecting fruit with a friend in a forest when she was attacked. A police official said she was swallowed up to her waist. The python, believed to have been more than 10 feet long, was killed and the body retrieved, the official said." Another report added "The snake was killed so her body could be recovered, said police in Rangamati, South Eastern Bangladesh. She is not the first victim of a python, which crushes victims around the chest before swallowing them slowly." [[http://www.hipakistan.com/en/detail.php?newsId=en46039&F\\_catID=&f\\_type=source](http://www.hipakistan.com/en/detail.php?newsId=en46039&F_catID=&f_type=source)]

### **Finally two salamander stories**

Of the groups that make up "herpetofauna," salamanders probably outweigh all the others in terms of biomass, but in terms of newspaper clippings, 18 years fill less than half an inch. The few there are, however, tend to be top quality, fresh perspective stories, like these.

- "Amphibian Casanovas beware: the ladies aren't likely to take infidelity lying down. Male salamanders returning home after a night of disloyalty can expect a beating. . . . [The study] surprised behavioral researchers: most instances of infidelity punishment place females on the receiving end of the abuse. Female red-backed salamanders . . . don't just take it — they dish it out too. . . . `This is the only species I know of where the male is intimidating the female and the female returns the favor,' says [the researcher]. No one is sure how common infidelity is among salamanders. But male red-backed salamanders are known to be aggressive toward female partners that have visited other males. But as males and females of this species are evenly matched in size . . . `It almost looks like the females are waiting at home with rolling pins when these poor unfaithful males come back,' [he added]. . . . The tactic is intended to coerce males into being monogamous, he suspects. . . . Until now, nobody has looked into how the monogamy [in these salamanders] is enforced. . . . Pheromones from a male's mistress stick to his skin. . . . The game is up when his partner spots this amphibian equivalent of lipstick on his collar. . . . Because the male salamanders do not help to care for their young, it isn't clear why the females



want them to stick around. The most likely explanation is that the females are trying to keep their partners from bringing other females back to their territory, where they could compete for resources such as food and shelter.” [Nature, November 21, 2003]

- For those of you old enough to remember the 80s, you may recall wonderful puzzles sold at the toy store across the street from Treasure Island Foods in Old Town. They were called “Shmuzzles” and each piece was shaped like an Escherian salamander. Each piece interlocked with every other piece in three different ways. This led to huge connectivity, but a low probability of success of the thing ever getting assembled in any configuration even close to the cover design. They were also fabulously expensive, which led to us just staring at them a lot and never actually getting one. Modern manufacturing technology has brought salamander shmuzzles down to the affordable. You can see how cool they are at < <http://shmuzzles.com/>> and watch animations of how they assemble. Reminds me of springtime at Ryerson in the pond.

### New Frog Scare

Officials on Guam are warning people to be on the look out for tiny greenhouse frogs which have lately been heard on that island. They are concerned that burgeoning populations of tiny food items may provide food for the brown tree snake which has already eaten most of the small comestibles on Guam in and around biting babies and causing power outages by basking on wires. Guam had no native frogs. The cane toad was introduced in 1937 in the hopes it would eat a black garden slug. Unfortunately no, but it is now considered Guam’s “most populous frog.” Even brown tree snakes don’t eat cane toads which have been known to sicken small animals that try to eat them. The dwarf tree frog arrived in the 1960s and the black-spotted pond frog seems to have been introduced during the 1990s. A Malaysian narrow-mouthed toad was discovered on a cargo plane at the Air Force Base, but none have been found in the wild. There have been some reports of coqui frog calls, but no specimens have been collected. What the frogs eat also concerns officials. On Hawai’i, two *Eleutherodactylus* species are eating native insects, including some that are needed for specialized pollinating tasks. Guam is also a major transportation hub in the Pacific — shippers may avoid the island if it becomes contaminated with greenhouse frogs and coquis, worry officials. “The [greenhouse frog invasion] should be an early warning for us that we need to do something to prevent the coqui from getting to Guam,” [an official said]. . . . “We need to pressure Hawaii to be sending frog-free shipments because the place to stop the frogs is in Hawaii. Once the frog has left Hawaii, you’ve already lost that first battle.” [Pacific Daily News, November 24, 2003, <http://www.guampdn.com/news/stories/20031124/localnews/698311.html>]

### Tourism just wasn’t an argument

A report on Voice of America stated: “For centuries, snake charmers were enduring symbols of India. But the community has been virtually forgotten in a modernizing country now known more for its computer engineers and software industry. . . . Snake charming was banned three decades ago as part of efforts

to protect India’s steadily depleting wildlife. Despite the laws, the nomadic community continued its trade for many years, but stricter implementation of the ban has now forced them to abandon their occupation. That has left tens of thousands of snake charmers struggling for existence and a culture at risk of extinction. . . . The Wildlife Trust of India began to explore livelihood options for the community. . . . The snake charmers’ music is the most vibrant part of the community’s culture and many of them have formed small musical groups. . . . On the outskirts of Delhi in what was once a snake charmers’ village . . . at one time tourist buses stopped . . . frequently to watch cobras swaying to music. But with the ban, the tourists and incomes are gone and the town is now a squalid settlement. . . . The community has extensive knowledge about medicinal herbs and plants, gathered over generations during their trips to the forest to trap snakes. . . . The community basically used the snake as an object to gain people’s attention, then sold their medicines to them. . . . They are also exploring the possibility of starting a snake-rescue service, especially in towns and farms where snakes frequently enter houses. [Voice of America News, December 5, 2003, <http://www.voanews.com/article.cfm?objectID=3345B065-CFD6-46B1-B51D3FEB06CCE424>]

### Northerly Sea Turtles

- More than 400 endangered leatherback sea turtles were reported off Canada’s East Coast near Halifax, Nova Scotia. This tops the previous record of 200 in 1998. Scientists do not know if there are (a) more turtles off Nova Scotia than before or (b) if the fisherman’s reporting network is just seeing more turtles. Fishermen have been telling tales of turtles there for years, but even people with turtle-talking fisherfolk in their families say there is an increase, particularly in 2003. Flipper tags installed off Cape Breton have been reported by researchers from Trinidad, Costa Rica and Panama. Since they eat jellyfish, and the area offshore Canada has zillions of jellies, researchers suggest they feed there from May to October and turtles seen after that are just late. Of course, disrupted ecosystems produce more jellyfish, so the increase in turtles may be related to an increase in jellyfish. Even the researchers admit they’re confused. One said, “It’s a year I don’t expect to see anything like again. It was remarkable.” [Nova Scotia Leatherback Turtle Working Group, <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Canada/2003/11/30/273221-cp.html>]

- Researchers further south along Cape Cod are reporting that the sea turtles they’ve found stranded this fall have been in better shape than in years past. The survival rate during transport to care facilities has been higher than in the past. Curiously of the 29 living turtles, 27 are Kemp’s ridley turtles which are the most endangered of all the sea turtles. One of the other two is a green turtle, the last one is described as a possible hybrid between a ridley and a green. [Cape Cod On-Line, November 28, 2003, <http://www.capecodonline.com/cctimes/strandedturtles28.htm>]

Thanks to my contributors; you know who they are. And you know how much you’d like to see your name here next month. So clip and send! Hope to hear from you soon.



## Unofficial Minutes of the CHS Board Meeting, November 14, 2003

Lori King called the meeting to order at 7:44 P.M. Board members Tom Anton, Mike Redmer and Jenny Vollman were absent.

### Officers' Reports

Recording Secretary: Zoe Magierek read the minutes of the October 17 board meeting. Corrections were made and the minutes were accepted.

Treasurer: Jim Hoffman presented an income statement and a balance sheet. Joan Moore asked about the location of the income from the Notebaert shows and Steve Spitzer asked if we had ever received payment from the flower show.

Membership: Mike Dloogatch reported a slight gain in membership over the past few months. Mike wondered if we should send a reminder postcard about the early date of the general meeting. Jack Schoenfelder moved to allocate the funds to print and mail reminder postcards, Linda Malawy seconded. All in favor, except for Jim Hoffman abstaining.

Vice-president: No speaker yet confirmed for December.

### Committee Reports

Shows: Lori King mentioned that Michelle from the Notebaert Museum has a new exhibits director who is very interested in working with us. Lori thanked Joan Moore for her participation in the previous Notebaert weekend shows. Linda Malawy suggested having different coordinators for each future Notebaert weekend and Jenny Vollman volunteered to coordinate overall. Lori said that in the new wetlands exhibit there might be overnight storage space for us and that she would be talking with museum personnel about parking, lunch and CHS publicity. The first weekend is scheduled for November 29–30.

Nominating Committee: The committee is still working on a program for the election meeting. Jim Hoffman wondered if the slate had appeared in the minutes of the previous board meeting. It had not; listing the slate in front of the board in the future, so it gets recorded in the minutes, was discussed.

Raffle: Linda Malawy has some nice raffle items that will be used for higher attendance meetings. We may run out of items after December. If need be, Jack can provide some items for a few months. Erik Williams will send more solicitation letters.

General Meeting Sales:

Books: Income exceeded expense and a final accounting will be provided at the end of the year. Joan will know by December if she intends on continuing the book sales.

Trout Chow and CHS Merchandise: Sales have picked up a little. Jack mentioned that for the holiday sale he will need an extra few tables. Lori suggested putting a note on the meeting reminder postcards about the sale.

Conservation: Lori King has plans for a newly constituted Conservation Committee beginning in January. Jim Hoffman suggested setting up a special fund for monies received and disbursed by the Cryptobranchid Interest Group.

Speakers' Bureau: Jack Schoenfelder said that Matt Campbell will chair the speakers' bureau as of January. Matt mentioned working with Rob Carmichael, going to schools and giving

talks relating to science curriculum standards.

Annual Awards: Joan Moore stated that the awards will be ready on time and on budget for the December meeting.

### Old Business

State Reptile/Amphibian: The Amphibian push is going fast and furious. The schools are researching candidates, and the voting will take place after the holiday break.

Proposed Chicago Animal Ban Ordinance: The panel of ten is set; Lori hopes they will meet before the end of the year.

The board discussed a personnel issue and unanimously passed a motion to send a letter in regard to this.

### New Business

Lori got a call from a person in the communications and public relations department at Brookfield Zoo. They are contemplating a new reptile building and wanted to interview CHS members about reptiles and amphibians.

A CHS member wrote the board pointing out that there were no safety belts on the buses for the zoo trip earlier this year. Safety rules and calling the bus company were discussed.

Dave McGowan is making a documentary on Midwestern frogs. He needs help finding them and is looking for volunteers to help. Ron Humbert offered to help him. Mike Dloogatch offered to put a paragraph in the *Bulletin* about his project.

### Ideas and Suggestions

Joan Moore mentioned that we keep no written record of meeting attendance, which was 55 in September and 56 in October. Perhaps it could be recorded in the minutes in a Sergeant-at-arms report? Lori said that Joan asked her previously to remove Sergeant-at-arms' report from the agenda. Ron Humbert agreed that the meeting counts should be tracked. Mike Dloogatch made a plea for someone to write a column for the *Bulletin* summarizing the general meeting programs.

### Round Table

Ron Humbert mentioned the Michigan Natural Features Inventory grants for work on non-game vertebrates in Michigan. If interested please see him.

Matt Campbell said there would be a grand opening for the new Lake Forest Wildlife Discovery Center from 2 to 4 P.M. on Sunday, November 16.

Joan Moore mentioned a few suggestions/reminders for during the programs at general meetings: please turn cell phones off, help the speaker repeat questions, and perhaps ask the group and the speaker to refrain from asking/answering questions until the presentation is over.

Lori King said that a proposed animal ban in Ann Arbor, Michigan, had been scrapped.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:58 P.M.

*Respectfully submitted by Recording Secretary Zoe Magierek*



**Index to Scientific Names of Amphibians and Reptiles for Volume 38 (2003)**

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**Erratum: Hamilton, Mark B., Northern Watersnakes, *Nerodia sipedon sipedon*,  
on the Lower Missouri River, Clark County, Missouri**

**Mark B. Hamilton**  
**Missouri Western State College**  
**4525 Downs Drive**  
**Saint Joseph, MO 64507-2294**

In the above-mentioned article [Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 38(11):220-221] references to Clark County, Missouri, both in the title and in the text, should in fact have been to St. Charles County, Missouri.



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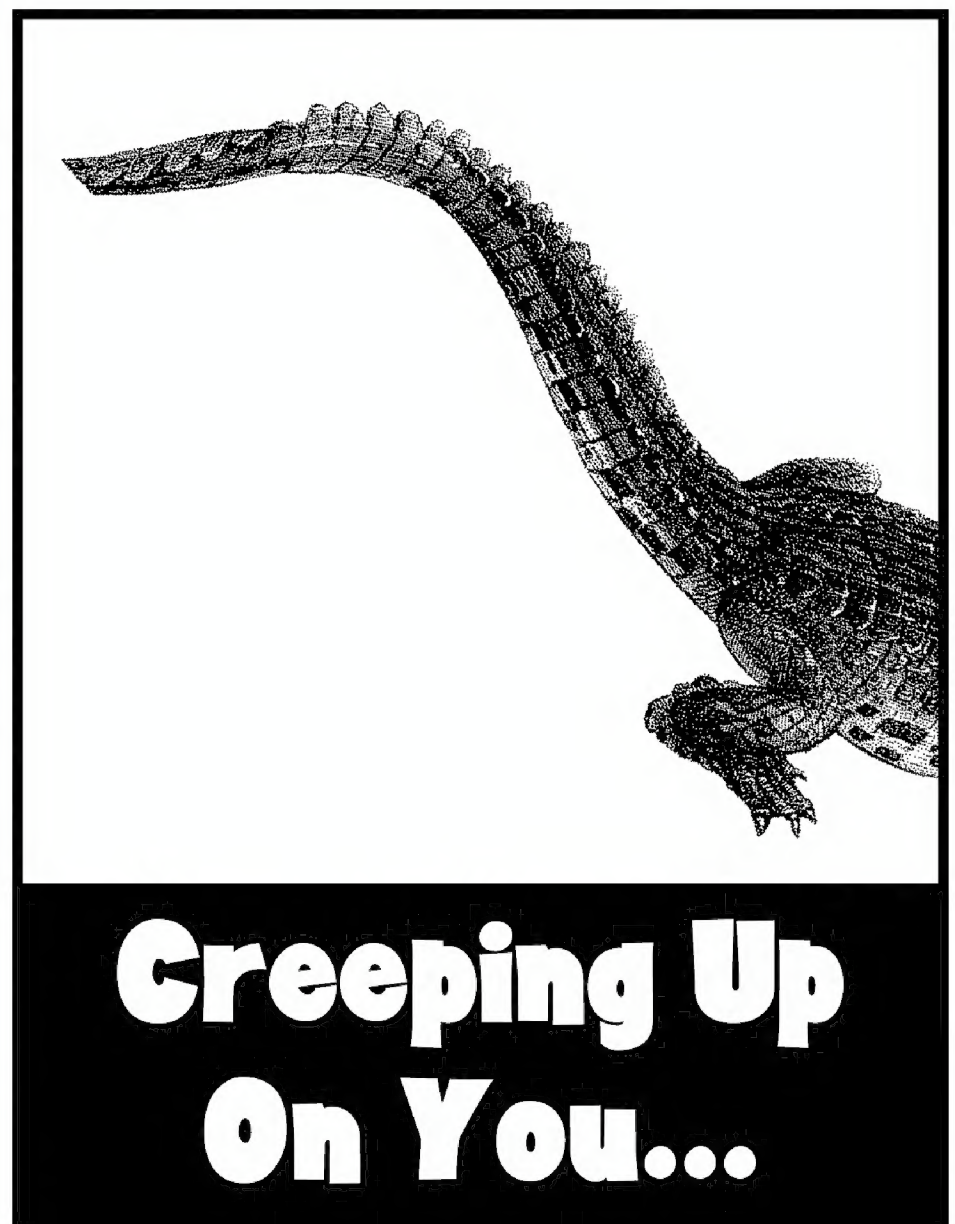
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Internship: The Kentucky Reptile Zoo, a nonprofit organization, seeks student interns for the 2004 spring, summer and fall seasons. The zoo is an educational exhibit, reptile breeding and venom research facility located near Kentucky's Red River Gorge and Natural Bridge State Park. The intern will assist in the captive maintenance of the zoo's reptile collection, collect admissions to the exhibit, give interpretive talks and interact with the public, assist with educational outreach programs, and perform other duties as assigned. In addition, the intern will be responsible for the completion of at least one research project related to the field of herpetology. The intern will not be involved in the handling of any venomous reptiles. Desirable qualifications include a willingness to handle snakes and other reptiles on a daily basis, ability to communicate effectively with people, writing skills, orientation to details, and self-motivation. The intern will be required to work both Saturday and Sunday, with days off during the week. Interns are required to be either current college students or recent graduates; students majoring in the biological or natural sciences are preferred. Former interns have arranged for academic credit with their colleges or universities. Interns have also been successful in finding zookeeper positions, with a hire rate of over 95%! Benefits include experience with the most extensive and diverse collection of snakes in the U.S., housing and \$55/week to cover expenses. Personal transportation is recommended. A valid driver's license is required. Starting dates are flexible, but a minimum commitment of 3 months covering spring (March-May), summer (June-August), or fall (September-November) is required. To apply send a cover letter, resume, transcript, and at least 2 (preferably 3) references to: Kristen Wiley, Internship Coordinator, Kentucky Reptile Zoo, 200 L&E Railroad, Slade KY 40376. Or E-mail: [kyreptil@mailhost.mis.net](mailto:kyreptil@mailhost.mis.net).

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Line ads in this publication are run free for CHS members — \$2 per line for nonmembers. Any ad may be refused at the discretion of the Editor. Submit ads to: Michael Dloogatch, 6048 N. Lawndale Avenue, Chicago IL 60659, (773) 588-0728 evening telephone, (312) 782-2868 fax, E-mail: <MADadder0@aol.com>.

## News and Announcements

### HERP OF THE MONTH

Each monthly meeting will showcase a different herp. CHS members are urged to bring one specimen of the “Herp of the Month” to be judged against the entries from other CHS members. Prizes will be awarded to the top three winners as follows: 1st place—6 raffle tickets at next meeting; 2nd place—4 raffle tickets at next meeting; 3rd place—2 raffle tickets at next meeting. The categories for the coming months are:

| Month         | Description of Contestants |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| January 2004  | Herps from South America   |
| February 2004 | Herps from Africa          |
| March 2004    | Amphibians of the world    |
| April 2004    | Beginner herps             |
| May 2004      | Herps from Madagascar      |

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## UPCOMING MEETINGS

The December meeting of the Chicago Herpetological Society was held on Wednesday, December 17, earlier in the month than usual because of the holidays. In January we will return to our accustomed last Wednesday of the month meeting day, 7:30 P.M., at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Cannon Drive and Fullerton Parkway, in Chicago. As of this writing the speaker had not yet been confirmed for the January 28 meeting.

The regular monthly meetings of the Chicago Herpetological Society now take place at Chicago's newest museum — the **Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum**. This beautiful new building is at Fullerton Parkway and Cannon Drive, directly across Fullerton from the Lincoln Park Zoo. Meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month, from 7:30 P.M. through 9:30 P.M. Parking is free on Cannon Drive. A plethora of CTA buses stop nearby.

### Board of Directors Meeting

Are you interested in how the decisions are made that determine how the Chicago Herpetological Society runs? And would you like to have input into those decisions? If so, mark your calendar for the January 16 board meeting, to be held at the North Park Village Administration Building, 5801 North Pulaski Road, Chicago. To get there take the Edens Expressway, I-94, and exit at Peterson eastbound. Go a mile east to Pulaski, turn right and go south to the first traffic light. Turn left at the light into the North Park Village complex. At the entrance is a stop sign and a guardhouse. When you come to a second stop sign, the administration building is the large building ahead and to your left. There is a free parking lot behind the building.

### The Chicago Turtle Club

The monthly meetings of the Chicago Turtle Club are informal; questions, children and animals are welcome. Meetings normally take place at the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski, in Chicago. Parking is free. For more info call Lisa Koester, (773) 508-0034, or visit the CTC website: <http://www.geocities.com/~chicagoturtle>.

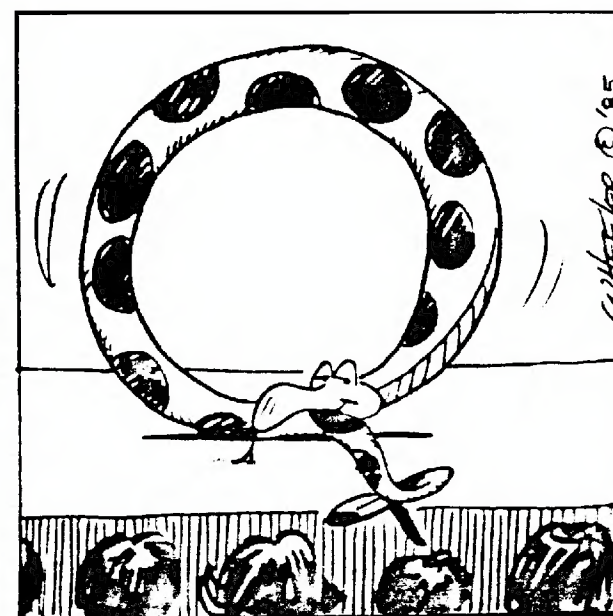
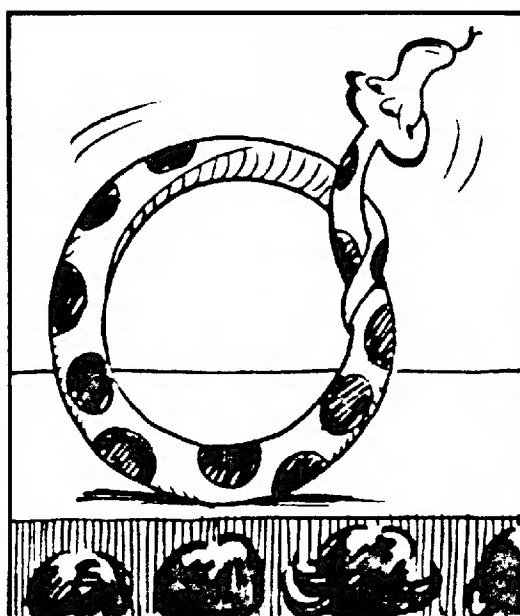
## ELECTION RESULTS

As a result of the elections held November 26, 2003, the following officers and members-at-large will serve on the CHS Board of Directors for the year 2004.

President: Lori King  
Vice-president: Linda Malawy  
Treasurer: Jim Hoffman  
Recording Secretary: Melanie Aspan  
Corresponding Secretary: Steve Spitzer  
Publications Secretary: Betsy Davis

Membership Secretary: Michael Dloogatch  
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